

## Chapter 25

### The "Poet Laureate of Empire" Issues a Word of Warning

(1897)  
Rudyard Kipling

#### Introduction

In the poem "Recessional," written for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) sent a warning to his generation of ardent imperialists. Kipling, who had been born in India, has long been regarded as a staunch advocate of European imperialism. His "White Man's Burden" (1899), written for the American audience during the Spanish-American War, is one of the most elegant summations of the "civilizing mission" justification of imperialism, replete with overtones of racial superiority. His stories and novels inspired many a young Englishman to seek his fame and fortune in the far reaches of the British Empire. Thus, the cautionary message of "Recessional" is somewhat of a paradox.

#### Questions to Consider

- What is Kipling warning his generation about?
- Offer an explanation for the paradox of the "Recessional."

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#### Recessional

God of our fathers, known of old--	39 If, drunk with sight of power, we loose
Lord of our far-flung battle line--	40 Wild tongues that have not Thee in awe--
Beneath whose awful hand we hold	41 Such boasting as the Gentiles use
Dominion over palm and pine--	42 Or lesser breeds without the Law--
— Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,	43 — Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
— Lest we forget--lest we forget!	44 — Lest we forget--lest we forget!
45	45
The tumult and the shouting die--	46 For heathen heart that puts her trust
The Captains and the Kings depart--	47 In reeking tube and iron shard--
Still stands thine ancient sacrifice,	48 All valiant dust that builds on dust,
An humble and a contrite heart.	49 And guarding calls not Thee to guard,
— Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,	50 For frantic boast and foolish word,
— Lest we forget--lest we forget!	51 Thy Mercy on thy People, Lord!
32	
Far-called, our navies melt away--	
On dune and headland sinks the fire--	
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday	
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!	
— Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,	
— Lest we forget--lest we forget!	